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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 LUSAKA 000500

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SUBJECT: UNOFFICIAL PING "ENVOY" MEETS WITH MUGABE; PING
VISITS ZAMBIA TO DISCUSS SADC-AU EFFORTS ON ZIMBABWE

Classified By: Ambassador Martinez for Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary. According to Vernon Mwaanga, a veteran Zambian diplomat and politician who met with Mugabe on the week of April 14 at the behest of AU Commission Chairperson Jean Ping, much of the blame for the current electoral crisis in Zimbabwe lies with the incompetence (rather than fraudulence) of the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission. Mugabe allegedly told Mwaanga that he intends to accept defeat if he loses the run-off election. In the event of his victory, Mugabe claims that he will step down within one year, handing over the party leadership and calling for a new presidential race. Mwaanga suggested that the best way forward would be for SADC to strengthen its election observer team and increase its dialogue with MDC and ZANU-PF representatives. Foreign Ministry Permanent Secretary Tens Kapoma told the Ambassador that Jean Ping was in Lusaka on May 2 to discuss ways in which the AU could become more supportive of SADC efforts on Zimbabwe. End Summary.

¶2. (C) On May 6, Vernon Mwaanga met with the Ambassador at her request to share information about his recent visit to Harare, which he claims was undertaken at the behest of AU Commission Chair Jean Ping. The shrewd, veteran Zambian diplomat and politician explained that his friendship to Mugabe dates back to the early 1970s when Mwaanga served as Zambia's foreign minister and the GRZ provided significant support to Zimbabwe's freedom struggle. Mwaanga said that during his week-long visit to Harare in mid-April he had met with Mugabe several times, as well as representatives from the MDC and the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC).

¶3. (C) Mwaanga described Mugabe as "completely shocked" at not having won the presidential election. He said Mugabe was also tremendously upset with Mwanawasa for hosting the SADC emergency summit. Mwaanga said Mugabe would not accept a government of national unity as this would entail departing from the constitutionally-defined electoral process. Allegedly, Mugabe told Mwaanga that he will accept the election results if he loses the run-off. In the event that he wins the run-off, Mugabe explained his intention to remain in office for less than a year. According to Mwaanga, Mugabe means to turn over the ZANU-PF party leadership, perhaps to Emmerson Mnangagwa, and prepare the way for a ZANU-PF victory in an ensuing presidential race.

¶4. (C) In response to the Ambassador's repeated emphasis on human rights abuse and voter intimidation, Mwaanga acknowledged that Mugabe is aware of--and perhaps even behind--some of this violence. He posited that Mugabe's security apparatus is, on its own initiative, perpetuating most of these acts. Mwaanga said Mugabe's supporters in the military are "extremely passionate about maintaining the status quo," lest they find themselves being held accountable before a new government. When the Ambassador insisted that human rights violence was taking place with Mugabe's consent

if not direction, Mwaanga conceded the point. Mwaanga said that in his view, despite allegations otherwise, Mugabe has retained his control and is not being guided by his "securocrats."

15. (C) Mwaanga said that he had spoken with Tsvangirai, Biti, and other senior MDC leaders, although he had less to say about these meetings. He said MDC was still divided internally as to whether or not to participate in run-off elections. Mwaanga said that he had relayed to MDC the substance of his discussions with Mugabe and that MDC representatives had said, in response, that they would be prepared to come to terms with Mnangagwa. According to Mwaanga, the MDC leaders said that their contention was only with Mugabe and not with the ZANU-PF party.

16. (C) Mwaanga implied that most of the blame for the electoral crisis belongs with the ZEC, which he described as entirely incompetent and inexperienced. Mwaanga said the ZEC Commissioners had been unable to answer even his simplest questions. In a private meeting, the ZEC Chair complained to Mwaanga saying (in reference to the ZEC Commissioners) "You see what I have to work with." Mwaanga shared his view that the ZEC made an imprudent mistake by not releasing the election results immediately, but did so in order to verify the outcomes in various districts rather than tamper with or alter the results. Mwaanga said that he had seen the preliminary ZEC results and that these did not differ from those that the ZEC announced on May 2.

17. (C) Regarding a way forward, Mwaanga (who said he had debriefed Mwanawasa on his activities in Zimbabwe) suggested that a second SADC emergency summit would not be useful,

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given the divisions within SADC between liberation movement alumni in Angola, Namibia, and South Africa, and other SADC leaders. He recommended that SADC strengthen its election observer team during the run-off elections, and work closely with MDC and ZANU-PF to improve understanding.

18. (C) On May 7, Ambassador spoke with Foreign Ministry Permanent Secretary Tens Kapoma, who had just participated in a troika meeting of the SADC Organ for Politics, Defense, and Security. He said the meeting had been "inconclusive" on the issue of Zimbabwe. Kapoma, however, told the Ambassador that AU Commission Chairman Jean Ping had visited Lusaka for three hours on May 2 to discuss with President Mwanawasa ways in which the AU could become more involved and supportive of SADC efforts with regard to Zimbabwe. Kapoma said that there were no concrete plans to call for another emergency summit.

19. (C) Comment: Mwaanga is a slippery character with some shadows in his past, but he may still retain the confidence of both Mwanawasa and Mugabe. He also gave the impression that he is maintaining contact with both the MDC and ZANU-PF. Post will report on any developments, in the event that Mwaanga visits Harare again under alleged AU direction, or makes additional contacts with Mugabe. Although Mwaanga's accounts must be taken with some degree of caution, given his apparently warm relationship with Mugabe, they cannot be entirely dismissed either.

MARTINEZ